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Poetic Approaches to the Natural World: A Review

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The natural world has been one of the recurring subject of poetry in every age. The various landscapes, its changing seasons, its surrounding phenomena has been an inescapable part of the history of poetry. The Nature poem is affected by ideology, by literary conventions as well as social and cultural ideas. It is frequently written in the first person and incorporates personal observations of and philosophical reflections upon Nature. Modern Nature writing traces its root to the works of natural history that were popular in second half of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century poets and romantic poets were quite different in terms of employing the concept of Nature. For 18th century poets Nature was only a reality that was there and played no role in the life of human kind. When they make use of Nature they used it in terms of didacticism.

The age before Romanticism is called the age of reason age of rationality and many other such names because poets of this era gave major importance to everything that seemed reasonable and rational. Romantics relied on Nature mainly because for them Nature was their teacher, their guide, their source of inspiration. Oliver Goldsmith and William Cowper are the major names of 18th century poets who diverted a bit from old traditional poetry of 18th century. The poem *The Deserted Village* by Oliver Goldsmith is in a heroic couplet which is rich in external images. In the poem, the poet visits to a country side and mourns over the state of modern society where wealth increases and man goes towards destruction. While describing the village beauty Goldsmith sketches the village scene with the help of trees, flowers, springs, streams, farms, hills, nightingale songs, children and other aspects of Nature. The poem laments at the loss of simple bliss of Nature that is felt by the poor. Like Goldsmith William Copper talks about village images, Nature and simplicity in his poem *The Task*. His oft – quoted line *God made the country and man made the town* indicates his love of Nature and simplicity.

The poetic approach to the natural world is quite visible in the poetry of Alexander Pope, the greatest poet and verse satirist of the Augustan period. He displays his view and belief on natural world through his famous poem *Essay on man*. Pope depicts the role of Nature by setting the poem in a garden. He wants to convey the importance of how man must accept his own limitations and lead his life *to vindicate the ways of god to man*. However, we must yield to our pride and take responsibilities of our action by not blaming God. Pope leads his *Essay on Criticism* with the rule first follow Nature. For following Nature he means honoring classical precedent.

Among all other Nature poets of 19th century William Wordsworth stands first. His conception of Nature was not the outcome of any momentary impulse or experience. It was the

product of slow process extending from childhood to manhood. *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey* trace the growth of the poet's conception of Nature. On the basis of the poems three stages are observed. In the first stage, Nature served only a background to the poet's boyish sports as Wordsworth himself says

“ But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities of all trivial pleasure
(The Prelude)

The second stage of Wordsworth's love of Nature is the stage of more sensibility, devoid of thoughts. By this time he developed a living sensuous beauty of Nature

‘I roamed from hill to hill from rocks to rocks
Still craving combination of new forms
New pleasure , wider empire for the sight endowment and rejoiced
To lay the inner faculties asleep.
(The Prelude)

The third stage of Wordsworth love of Nature is marked with a communion with Nature. It is the stage when the poet sees Nature by the eyes of soul and not by the physical eyes. At this stage Wordsworth passes through a spiritual experience of Nature. Wordsworth regarded Nature as his best teacher. *The Prelude* is an account of the best of poets education that he received from Nature. He was always grateful to Nature for the means which she design to employ for the poet's intellectual and spirituals refinement. At this stage the foundation of Wordsworth entire existence was his mode of seeing God in Nature and Nature in god. This is known as the stage of pantheism. Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* talks about Nature, the full details of landscape surrounding Tintern Abbey. Initially, Wordsworth's saw Tintern Abbey when he was very young and Nature had a different role for him but when he revisited Tintern Abbey he wrote poem on it with his mature idea about Nature. The poem *Tintern Abbey* reveals a strong association between man and Nature which is absent 18th century poetry.

S T Coleridge, like other romantic poets , is a great poet of Nature. It is his delicate portrayal of the most fleeting charms of Nature that along with his supernaturalism and medievalism , constitute his romantic temper. Another feature of his Nature poetry is the sense of mystery with which he envelopes all his natural description. Since his all great poems are narrative poems, his natural description form and appropriate background to and get harmonized with the moods of his character. His *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is packed with apparent and colourful description of Nature in the form of Sun shining in the sky , the mist , the fog surrounding the ship, the iceberg floating hither and thither are incomparable.

“ Water , water everywhere
And all the boards did shrink
Water , water everywhere
Nor any drop to drink ”

Coleridge developed a passionate view of the idea that the Nature was the eternal language which god utters. In part 2nd of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* the horrifying spectacle of stagnant Nature is described so minutely that it appears that details howsoever minor is has not escaped the poets observation. The breeze drops and the whole atmosphere becomes sad and still. The bloody sun , no bigger that the moon stands right up above the mast in a hot and copper sky. The ship comes to stop and looks like a painted ship upon the painted ocean. Coleridge thinks that man has no capacity to create only god keeps the capability of creation. He loves all his creations. And the best prayer is to love all creatures big and small without discrimination for dear God who created all loves all .

‘ He prayeth best who loveth best
All thinks both great and small
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all’

Like all other romantic poets P B Shelley has deep and passionate love for Nature. Some of his poem such as *Ode to the West Wind*, *The Cloud* , *To a Skylark* contain a profusion of

Nature picture. Shelley's love for the indefinite and changeful in Nature may be seen in his description of the approach of the gale in the Ode to the West Wind where the west wind is first seen driving the dead leaves before it and scattering the living the seeds next awakening the Mediterranean from the sleep, finally making it force felt by the sea plant at the bottom of the Atlantic. Shelley gives graphics description of the forceful aspects of the wind. He brings out the duality in wind - a destroyer and preserver simultaneously. To Shelley forces of Nature possess redeeming quality. They have the power to bring about revolutionary changes. He looks upon the west wind as a great phenomenon of Nature endowed with great power to rid human beings of their pain and agonies. This is why he turns to the west wind and makes a fervent appeal to liberate from the present condition.

‘ Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud
I fall upon the thorns of life ! I bleed !
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed.’

The poetic approach to the natural world in the poetry of John Keats is simpler, more direct and more disinterested than in any other romantic poets. It was his instinct to love and interpret Nature more for her own sake and less for the sake of sympathy which the human mind can read into her. Keats is the great poet of senses, and he loves Nature because of the sense of hearing, the sense of smell, the sense of touch. He loves flowers because of their beauty of colour, fragrant smell and softness. He loves the streams because of their music. He loves the snow, the moon and the rainbow for their visual loveliness.

So far as the Nature poet of 20th century is concern the name of Robert Frost is worth mentioning. To Frost, Nature may a symbol of mans relation to the world but the most important aspect in his poetry remains his strong underlying message about man. In his poem *Stopping by Wood on Snowy Evening* Robert Frost presents a lovely picture of Nature in the following words.

‘ Woods are lovely dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
Miles to go before I sleep
Miles to go before I sleep’

To conclude Nature has been recurring theme in poetry through the ages its various landscapes, its changing seasons, its beautiful phenomenon have fascinated poets of every generation stimulating them to create verses on it. Among all other things glorification of Nature is an integral part of Romanticism.

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